

Message Text

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ACTION NEA-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 SAB-01

SAM-01 LAB-04 SIL-01 EB-07 /071 W

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R 251120Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 340

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

AMEMBASSY LOMEON

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

C O N F I D E N T I A L TEL AVIV 1365

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT IS

SUBJECT RESIGNATION OF LABOR PARTY SECRETARY

GENERAL (SC) MEIR MZARMI

SUMMARY: RESIGNATION OF LABOR PARTY SG ZARMI, WHICH AS OF NOW APPEARS VIRTUALLY FINAL DESPITE APPEAL BY RABIN AND OTHERS FOR ITS RETRACTION, HAS SPOTLIGHTED DEEP MALAISE WITHIN LABOR PARTY OVER NEAR-PARALYSIS OF PARTY INSTITUTIONS IN TWENTY MONTHS SINCE RABIN BECAME PRIME MINISTER. WHILE ZARMI RESIGNATION OSTENSIBLY MOTIVATED BY PARTY'S FINANCIAL WOES, UNDERLYING CAUSE IS HIS JUDGEMENT THAT, IN ABSENCE OF SUFFICIENT INVOLVEMENT BY RABIN, PARTY AFFAIRS HAVE BEEN SERIOUSLY DOWNGRADED. REFUSAL OF SEVERAL LABOR PARTY MINISTERS TO CONSIDER TAKING OVER SECRETARY GENERALSHIP ALSO ATTESTS TO ITS PRESENT DIFFICULTIES. RABIN'S CRITICS, WHO HAVE BEEN BELABORING HIM FOR FAILURE TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH HIS MINISTERIAL COLLEAGUES, HAVE NOW SEIZED ON ZARMI RESIGNATION TO DRAMATIZE HIS ALLEGED NEGLECT OF PARTY BASE. END SUMMARY.

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1. THE DECISION OF LABOR PARTY SECRETARY GENERAL MEIR

ZARMI TO RESIGN HIS POST AFTER LESS THAN TWO YEARS IN OFFICE HAS AGAIN HIGHLIGHTED THE DECLINE OF PARTY FORUMS AND THEIR FAILURE TO PLAY MEANINGFUL ROLE IN FORMULATION OF NATIONAL POLICY. ZARMI, IN ANNOUNCING HIS RESIGNATION FEBRUARY 19, LIMITED HIMSELF TO SAYING THAT MAIN MOTIVE WAS PARTY'S SERIOUS FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, BUT INDICATED THAT THESE WERE ONLY A SYMPTOM OF THE PARTY'S MORE BASIC DIFFICULTIES. (TEL AVIV 1273).

2. RABIN AND FINANCE MINISTER RABINOWITZ HAVE ASKED ZARMI TO RECONSIDER HIS RESIGNATION, BUT SO FAR HE HAS HELD FIRMLY TO HIS DECISION TO GIVE UP THE TOP PARTY POST. DIRECTOR OF LABOR PARTY INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS DIVISION, WHO DISCUSSED THE MATTER WITH ZARMI TODAY, HAS TOLD US THAT THE MATTER IS STILL UP IN THE AIR BUT THAT HE BELIEVES ZARMI DECISION TO BE FINAL.

3. LABOR PARTY LEADERSHIP SO FAR HAS BEEN SINGULARLY UNSUCCESSFUL IN ITS EFFORTS TO FIND A POSSIBLE SUCCESSOR SHOULD ZARMI RESIGNATION STICK. MINISTERS RABINOWITZ, OFER, BAR LEV AND FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER EBAN HAVE ALL DENIED THAT THEY ARE INTERESTED IN ASSUMING THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP. THE ONLY ACTIVE CANDIDATE AT THIS POINT IS UZI BARAM, THE HEAD OF JERUSALEM BRANCH OF THE PARTY AND SON OF LABOR MINISTER MOSHE BARAM WHO IS SUPPORTED BY PARTY'S INTERMEDIATE GENERATION ORGANIZATION (SHILUV). BARAM, WHO, TOGETHER WITH ZARMI AND EX-FINANCE MINISTER SAPIR, HAD SUPPORTED RABIN'S NOMINATION AT APRIL 1974 CENTRAL COMMITTEE MEETING HAS OF LATE BECOME STRONG CRITIC OF RABIN'S HANDLING OF NATIONAL PARTY AFFAIRS. IT WOULD APPEAR THAT ONE OF MAIN REASONS WHY RABIN IS TRYING TO CONVINCE ZARMI TO REVERSE HIS DECISION IS THE EVIDENT DIFFICULTY TO FIND AN ACCEPTABLE SUCCESSOR.

4. ZARMI RESIGNATION (ASSUMING IT STICKS) COMES AS NO SURPRISE. ZARMI HAD THREATENED TO RESIGN THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP SEVERAL TIMES LAST YEAR FOR MUCH THE SAME REASONS WHICH MOTIVATED HIS ANNOUNCEMENT LAST WEEK. IT HAS BEEN WIDELY KNOWN THAT ZARMI REGARDED THE FAILURE OF LABOR PARTY FORUMS TO PLAY AN ACTIVE ROLE IN FORMULATING GOVERN-

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MENT POLICY, AS WELL AS THE PARTY'S LONG-STANDING FINANCIAL PROBLEMS, AS REFLECTION OF THE RELATIVELY LOW PRIORITY WHICH ABIN AND OTHER TOP MINISTERS HAD GIVEN TO PARTY IN LAST YEAR AND A HALF. MOREOVER, ZARMI HAS BEEN SHARPLY CRITICIZED BOTH FROM WITHIN THE PARTY AND BY ISRAELI PRESS FOR FAILING TO EXERCISE STRONG LEADERSHIP. DESPITE AMIABLE PERSONALITY AND GENERALLY GOOD RELATIONS WITH ALL FACTIONS, HE CLEARLY HAS BEEN UNABLE TO LIFT THE PARTY OUT OF ITS DOLDRUMS. LONG

DELAY IN REACHING DECISION ON INTERNAL ELECTIONS FOR DELEGATES TO THE CONVENTION (SEE TEL AVIV 742) WAS MOST STRIKING EXAMPLE OF HIS DIFFICULTIES IN GETTING PARTY FORUMS TO FUNCTION. WE UNDERSTAND THAT DECISION TO HOLD INTERNAL ELECTIONS IN JUNE IS AGAIN IN ABEYANCE, AND THAT FURTHER DELAY IS VIRTUALLY CERTAIN.

5. ISRAELI MEDIA HAVE HIGHLIGHTED ZARMI'S RESIGNATION AS ONE MORE EXAMPLE OF CURRENT DIFFICULTIES CONFRONTING RABIN AND THE LABOR PARTY. MA'ARIV EDITORIAL OBSERVED THAT THE REFUSAL OF ANY LEADING PERSONALITY TO TAKE OVER THE SECRETARY GENERALSHIP, AS WELL AS THE RECOMMENDATION FOR A CHANGE OF GOVERNMENT BY SEVERAL LABOR PARTY PERSONALITIES INCLUDING FORMER CHIEFS OF MILITARY INTELLIGENCE -- AHARON YARIV AND MEIR AMIT -- IN WEEKEND RADIO INTERVIEW REPRESENTS "A GRAVE SYMPTOM OF CRISIS FOR BOTH THE GOVERNMENT AND LABOR PARTY."

6. COMMENT: WE DO NOT SHARE THE APOCALYPTIC VIEW ADOPTED BY MA'ARIV. NONETHELESS, ZARMI'S RESIGNATION HAS COME AT SINGULARLY INOPPORTUNE MOMENT FOR RABIN. ON TOP OF SHARP CRITICISM TO WHICH HE IS BEING SUBJECTED FOR HIS HANDLING OF THE CABINET, HE IS NOW ALSO BEING ACCUSED PUBLICLY OF HAVING NEGLECTED PARTY AFFAIRS. WE ARE INCLINED TO AGREE WITH ABIN'S OWN ASSESSMENT THAT LABOR PARTY TROUBLES ARE TO BE ATTRIBUTED LESS TO ERRORS OR SHORTCOMINGS OF INDIVIDUALS THAN TO THE INEVITABLE DIFFICULTIES ACCOMPANYING THE PARTY'S POST-1973 LEADERSHIP CRISIS AND ALL THAT HAS COME IN ITS WAKE.
TOON

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